



Tobacco and Oral Health

Almost everybody knows that smoking can cause lung diseases, heart disease, and stroke. Ever think about what happens to the place where you put the tobacco—your mouth? Stained teeth, brown, hairy tongue, and bad breath are the least

of your problems.

Smoking

- Reduces blood flow to your gums and cuts the supply of vital nutrients.
- Reduces vitamin C levels, which is needed to keep your gums healthy.
- Can cause gum disease, bone loss, and tooth loss.
- Reduces your saliva flow. Saliva is needed to clean the lining of your mouth and protect teeth from decay.
- Raises the mouth's temperature, damaging and killing important cells in your mouth.
- Releases tobacco compounds that cause oral cancer (cancer of the mouth).

* Smokers are 2 to 18 times more likely to develop oral cancer than non-smokers.

Smokeless tobacco (moist snuff, dip, or chewing tobacco)

- Eats away at your gums and wears them down.
- Increases your risk of tooth decay and gum disease.
- Increases the risk of any oral cancer by four to six times.

* Smokeless tobacco users are up to 50 times more likely to develop oral cancer in areas where the tobacco is placed.

Early warning signs of oral cancer

- A swelling, lump, or growth in the mouth that does not heal.
- White or red patches inside the mouth that don't go away.
- Loose teeth for no apparent reason.
- Pain when swallowing.
- Persistent sore throat.
- Difficulty swallowing or in opening your mouth.
- A nagging cough or persistent hoarseness.
- Unusual bleeding in your nose or mouth.
- Numbness or tingling in your lips or tongue.

If you have signs or symptoms, see a dentist. Dentists are highly trained specialists in oral diseases. They can detect oral cancers at an early stage when they are small and most treatable.

Best defenses against oral cancer

- Stop using tobacco.
- Check yourself for oral cancer once a month if you use tobacco.
- Get an oral cancer examination at your annual dental visit.

